Shared parenting

Shared parenting, **shared residence**, **joint residence**, **shared custody**, and **joint physical custody**, all refers to a child custody arrangement after divorce or separation, in which both parents share the responsibility of raising their child(ren), with equal or close to equal parenting time.[1] A regime of shared parenting is based on the idea that children have the right to and benefit from a close relationship with both their parents, and that no child should be separated from a parent. Shared parenting is increasing in popularity and it is particularly common in Scandinavia.[2][3][4]

The term *Shared Parenting* is applied in cases of divorce, separation or when parents do not live together; in contrast, a Shared Earning/Shared Parenting Marriage is a marriage where the partners choose to share the work of child-raising, earning money, house chores and recreation time in nearly equal fashion across all four domains. *Shared parenting* is different from split custody, where some children live primarily with their mother while one or more of their siblings live primarily with their father.

Bird's nest custody is an unusual form of shared parenting where the child always lives in the same home, while the two parents takes turns living with the child in that home. Its long term use can be expensive as it requires three residences, and it is most commonly used as a temporary shared parenting arrangement until one parent has found a suitable home elsewhere.[5]

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Frequency

The popularity of shared parenting is increasing. The frequency of shared parenting versus sole custody varies across countries, being most common in Scandinavia.[2][3][4]

In a comparative survey of 34 western countries conducted in 2005/06, the proportion of 11-15 year old children living in a shared parenting arrangement versus sole custody was highest in Sweden (17%), followed by Iceland (11%), Belgium (11%), Denmark (10%), Italy (9%) and Norway (9%). Ukraine, Poland, Croatia, Turkey, the Netherlands and Romania all had 2% or less. Among the English speaking countries, Canada and the United Kingdom had 7% while the United States and Ireland had 5%.[6] By 2016/17, the percentage in Sweden had increased to 28%; with 26% for children age 0-5 years, 34% among the 6-12 year old age group, and 23% among the oldest children ages 13-18.[7]

Scientific research

Epidemiological studies on the effect of shared parenting on children has been conducted using both cross-sectional and longitudinal study designs. Their conclusions are that children with a shared parenting arrangement have better physical, mental, social and academic outcomes compared to children in a primary parenting arrangement. These finding holds for all age groups, whether the parents have an amicable or high-conflict relationship, and after adjusting for socio-economic variables.[3][8][9]

With its early adoption of shared parenting and excellent health data, the largest studies on shared parenting have been conducted in Sweden.[4] In a large cross-sectional study comparing over 50,000 children, ages 12 and 15, living in either a shared or sole custody arrangement, Dr. Malin Bergström found that children with shared parenting had better outcomes for physical health, psychological well-being, moods and emotions, self-perception, autonomy, parental relations, material outcomes, peer relations, school satisfaction and social acceptance.[10] Using data from the same cross-sectional survey, Bergström did a follow-up study focusing on psychosomatic problems of concentration, sleeping, headaches, stomach aches, tenseness, lack of appetite, sadness and dizziness. They found that both boys and girls did better living in a shared parenting versus sole custody arrangement. Both studies adjusted for selected socio-economic variables.[11]

Based on a review of 60 quantitative research studies, Dr. Linda Nielsen found that in 34 of the studies, children in a shared parenting arrangement had better outcomes on all measured variables for well-being. In 14 studies, they had better or equal outcomes on all measures; in 6 studies that had equal outcomes on all measures; and in 6 studies that had worse outcomes on one measure and equal or better outcomes on the remaining measures. The results were similar for the subset of studies that adjusted for socio-economic variables and the level of conflict between parents. The variables for which shared parenting had the biggest advantage were family relationships, physical health, adolescent behavior and mental health, in that order. The variable with the smallest difference was academic achievement, for which only 3 out 10 studies showed an advantage for shared parenting.[4] Among other things, Nielsen has concluded that *Maintaining strong relationships with both parents by living in shared parenting families appears to offset the damage of high parental conflict and poor co-parenting* and that such *parents are more likely to have detached, distant, and parallel parenting relationships than to have co-parenting relationships*.[8]

To fully understand the reasons for findings from quantitative epidemiological studies, biological and qualitative research is needed. Dr. Anna Machin has studied father-child relationships using evolutionary anthropology, asserting that human fatherhood *would not have emerged unless the investment that fathers make in their children is vital for the survival of our species*, and that just like mothers, *fathers have been shaped by evolution to be biologically, psychologically and behaviourally primed to parent*.[12]

Parental benefits

While the primary arguments for shared parenting is based on the child's best interest of having close contact with both parents in their daily life, there are also important advantages to the parents. Most parents enjoy spending time with their children, and with shared parenting, both parents have that joy in their life. Both parents also get child-free time to work or play without having to hire a baby sitter, which a sole custodial parent must do. Moreover, both parents get the same opportunity for career development and advancement. In fact, some argue that shared parenting is one critical component in the efforts to reduce the gender pay gap.[13][14][15][16]

Criticism

According to Dr. Edward Kruk, there has been three waves of criticism against shared parenting as a legal presumption and the default custody arrangement for most children.[17] In the first wave, shared parenting was considered outlandish as it was thought (i) that children need one single primary attachment figure to bond with, (ii) that child development suffer from frequent moves back and forth between two households, and (iii) that one should not disrupt the status quo.[17] When scientific research showed these to be false, a second wave of criticism argued that shared parenting increases parental conflict and that shared parenting is

only suitable for parents who get along well as co-parents.[17][18] When research showed the opposite to be true, a third wave of criticism acknowledges that shared parenting may be the best solution for most children, but that there should be no presumptions in family law, so that each judge can decide what he or she thinks is in the best interest of a child.[17]

Other lines of criticism, not mentioned by Kruk, is that shared parenting requires more logistical coordination.[18][19][20]

Legislation

To counter the prevalence of sole custody, there are efforts to change the law to encourage *shared parenting* and/or make it the default option in family court. This is typically done by establishing a legal rebuttable presumption for *shared parenting* which is rebuttable in cases of child abuse or neglect to make sure that courts do not order order children to live with an abusive or neglectful parent. Bills promoting shared parenting has been introduced in Italy[21], Canada[22][23] and the United States. In 2018, Kentucky became the first jurisdiction to establish a legal presumption for shared parenting, after the house voted 81-2 and the senate voted 38-0 in favor, and after the bill was signed by governor Matt Bevin.[24][25] Similar laws were passed by both chambers in Minnesota and Florida, but vetoed by the governors.[26][27][28][29][30] Shared parenting laws have been introduced in most US states but have usually died in the judiciary committee, preventing a vote in the full house or senate.[31]

In the United States, some of the strongest opposition to shared parenting legislation has come from family lawyers and state bar associations, who argue that it is important to preserve judicial discretion.[3][14][32] For example, the State Bar Association spent money to defeat a shared parenting bill in North Dakota[33] and family attorneys successfully lobbied the governors to veto shared parenting legislation in Florida,[29][30] Hawaii[34] and Minnesota.[27]

Advocacy

The advocacy for shared parenting is a world-wide movement. It is unified in its belief that shared parenting is in the best interest of children, and that it is a children's right issue. The gender perspective varies greatly across nations though. In the Scandinavian countries, such as Iceland, it is commonly viewed as a gender equity issue with strong support from women's organizations. As a contrast, in North America, several organizations see it as a father's rights issue, and some women's organizations work against shared parenting, while other women are among the strongest advocates. As yet another contrast, in countries like Turkey and Iran, it is often seen as a women's right issue, as sole custody is commonly awarded to the father. The president of the International Council on Shared Parenting, Edward Kruk, has commented that *the characterization of parental alienation and shared parenting as "fathers' rights" issues has rendered invisible the plight of many mothers, and negatively affected the global campaign to establish shared parenting as the foundation of family law as a fundamental right of women and their children.*[35][36][37]

There are a number of organizations that advocate for shared parenting as being in the best interest of children. The primary international organization is the International Council on Shared Parenting, with both academic, professional and community members. In the United States, the leading shared parenting organization is the National Parents Organization, with state affiliates in California, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah and Virginia.[38]

National and International Shared Parenting Advocacy Organizations

Name	Geography	Founded	Motto	Website
American Coalition of Fathers and Children	USA	1996	*children need both parents*	acfc.org (http://www.acfc.org/)
Americans for Equal Shared Parenting	USA		*between the parents - about the child*	afesp.com (https://afesp.com/)
Canadian Children's Rights Council	Canada	1991		canadiancrc.com
Canadian Equal Parenting Council	Canada	2002	*kids need both parents!*	equal-parenting.org (http://equal-parenting.org/)
Children's Rights Council	USA	1985	*the best parent is both parents*	crckids.org (https://www.crckids.org/)
Children's Rights Initiative for Shared Parenting	India			crisp-india.org (http://www.crisp-india.org/)
Families Need Fathers	United Kingdom	1974	*because both parents matter*	fnf.org.uk (https://fnf.org.uk/)
Family Reunion	USA			familyreunionusa.org (http://www.familyreunionusa.org/)
International Council on Shared Parenting	International	2013	*at home at mum's and at home at dad's*	TwoHomes.org (https://twohomes.org/en_home)
Leading Women for Shared Parenting	International	2013		lw4sp.org (http://lw4sp.org/)
National Parents Organization	USA	1998	*preserving the bond between parents and children*	nationalparentsorganization.org (https://www.nationalparentsorganization.org/)
Pappa Barn	Sweden	2006	*förening för mammor, pappor och anhöriga*	pappabarn.se (http://www.pappabarn.se/sv-SE)
Platform for European Fathers	Europe	2011		europeanfathers.wordpress.com (https://europeanfathers.wordpress.com/home/)
Shared Parenting Council of Australia	Australia	2002		flwg.com.au/guide/pg/spca/ (http://flwg.com.au/guide/pg/spca)
Shared Parenting Information Group	United Kingdom	1996	*promoting responsible shared parenting after separation and divorce*	spig.clara.net (http://www.spig.clara.net/)
Shared Parenting Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland		*helping parents maintain contact with children post relationship breakdown*	familiesinneedoffathers.info (http://www.familiesinneedoffathers.info/)
The Father's Rights Movement	USA			fathersrightsmovement.us (https://fathersrightsmovement.us/)
Time to Put Kids First	USA	2014		timetoputkidsfirst.org (https://www.timetoputkidsfirst.org/)
Väter für Kinder	Germany	1988	*ich brauche beide (I need both)*	vaeterfuerkinder.de (http://www.vaeterfuerkinder.de/index.html)
Verein für elterliche Verantwortung	Switzerland	1992		vev.ch (https://www.vev.ch/)

See also

- Child custody
- Coparenting
- Parenting plan
- Shared residency in England
- Joint custody (United States)
- Joint custody (Spain)

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External links

- National Parents Organization.org (http://www.nationalparentsorganization.org/) (Largest member supported shared parenting organization in the USA)
- Equal Shared Parenting.com (http://www.equalsharedparenting.com/) Video Education, Summary Facts and Statistics about Shared Parenting and Child Behavior, Bills, Votes, News
- Shared Parenting Council of Australia (https://web.archive.org/web/20081004094739/http://www.familylawwebguide.com.au/spca/index.php?page=)
- American Coalition for Fathers and Children (http://acfc.org/)
- Families Need Fathers - Prominent shared parenting charity in the UK (http://www.fnf.org.uk/)
- Equally Shared Parenting (http://www.equallysharedparenting.com/)

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